

# Clap Clap, I Approve!

Works by Rabia Farooqui





Wow but how?, gouache on wasli, 104 x76 cm, 2017

# The mirror and its image

## Quddus Mirza

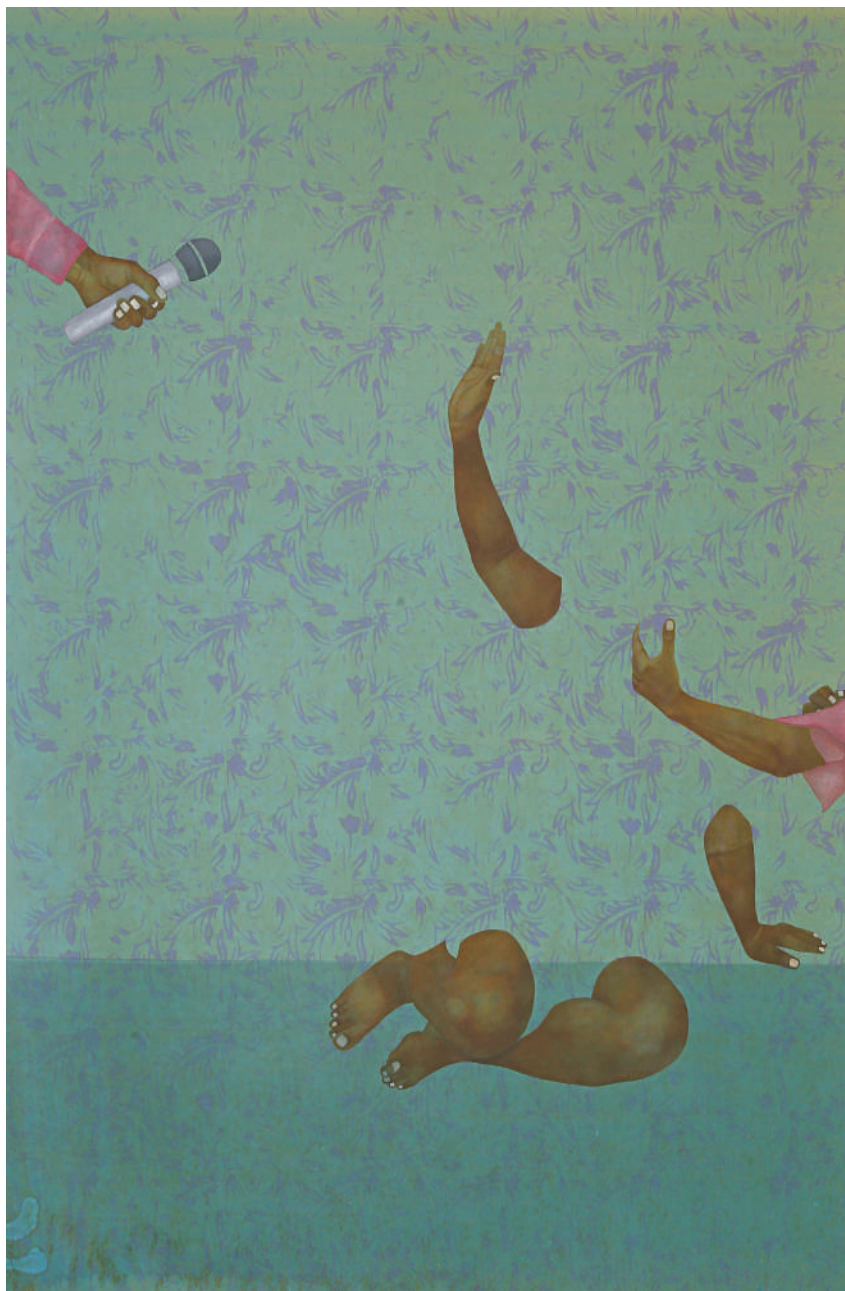
Singular word holds a limited meaning, but once it is placed next to other words, the meaning expands, and becomes a source of multiple interpretations. Writers, especially poets experiment with composing words, thus creating stories, novels, poems, plays etc. Jose Saramago commenting on his compatriot Fernando Pessoa, describes him that he spent his whole life, 'arranging words'. The value of an author is determined how well he/she joins words, so that when we read the text, we not only get the content, but enjoy the form too (if two can be separated!).

Like words, human beings also emanate meanings in their lives, once attached to one another. A family member, friend, fellow traveller, a colleague, or even a foe, makes it possible to have a conversation, which holds different kinds of narratives. But regardless, if the other person is a close associate or a distant enemy, what an individual recognizes in others, is his/her self. A reason to associate, connect and converse in the first place!

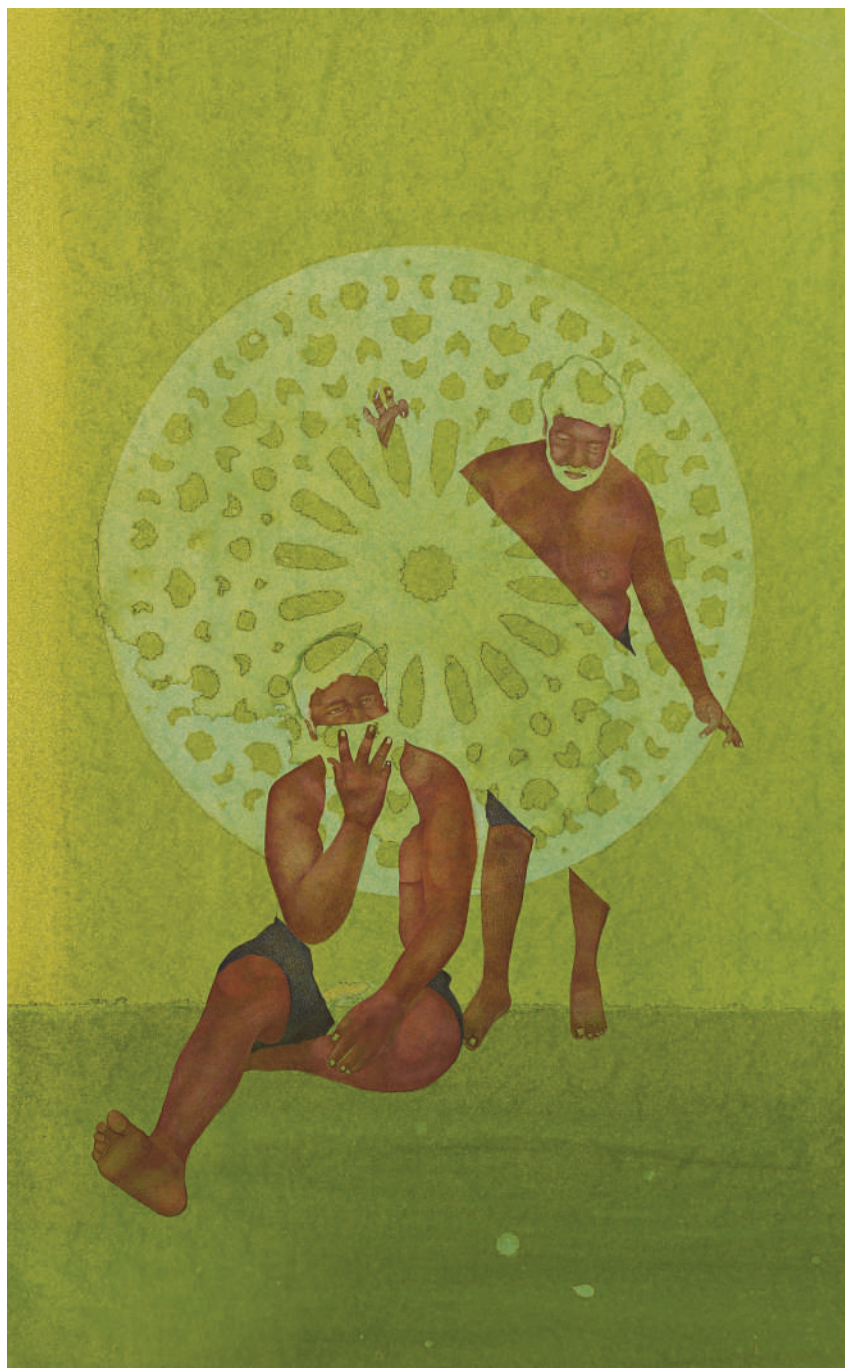
Others are like mirror, as the last person on the earth who would not find other human beings would lose the language too, he/she would also lose his/her identity as human. Actually, it is the Other which forms us: our parents, ancestors, teachers, mentors, etc. In new works of Rabia Farooqui, one gets to know the presence of other. Like a shadow. A man, middle aged, healthy, bearded, and mostly bare chested, seem to be in interaction with another being, almost his clone. Either in a combat, sharing music, in conversation, or jointly exercising, the person wearing baseball cap and sports boots looks a strange character. However still plausible, since you may come across this individual on a street corner in any city of Pakistan.

Yet it is the presence of the other, his alter ego, or spirit that adds the unusualness to this figure. Almost identical, but performing a different task. For example, one is tired and lying on floor while other is on a treadmill machine; one is stretching his shirt when other is playing his guitar; he is resting against sofa and the other person aiming his axe towards a rose; the person is sitting on the floor without his sash but is surrounded by the other who is holding same cloth; one is punching the other who is crouching on earth. These visuals in a way lead to a disturbing feeling because one detects an element of conflict or violence in them. The artist states about this aspect of her work: "I strive to create scenarios where the obvious presence of a conflict exists; a mere contradiction of two opposing thoughts which are influenced by preconceived standards and views set by society". This aspect is subtly suggested through other set of images, because even though in normal situations (being offered a microphone, being helped to get up, pointing towards a cat, playing tennis





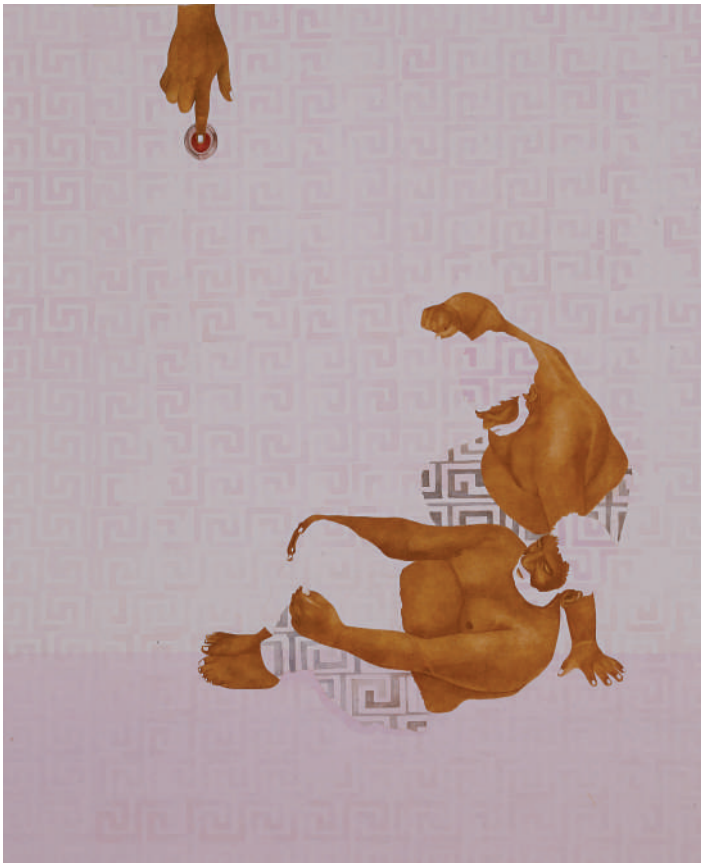
Sur'ft Taal, gouache on wasli, 107 x 71 cm, 2017



Slice of life, gouache on wasli, 52 x 32 cm, 2017

with four rugby players) the fact of a man is not fully dressed infuses a sense of unease, oddity, and inexplicability.

However, one may find some more clues to Farooqui's choice of imagery. Apart from the artist's personal interpretation, visuals create diverse narratives. For instance, in most works, one comes across hand of another entity, either holding flower, mic, pressing a bell, clapping, pointing (that particular segment reminds God's hand from the Creation of Adam painted by Michelangelo in the Sistine chapel), playing trumpet, having a remote control, holding or dropping a ball, all of which that invokes the idea of audience. A spectator who is part of the action, yet on the fringes. "We could think one thing however act another". Perhaps the inclusion of a mere hand in the scenario connects that invisible person within the painting to an outside viewer, who seems to be doing almost the same job: echoing the hand or arm of that unknown figure, enters his gaze into the image, thus becomes a part of the entire composition/drama.



It's a click away, gouache on wasli, 65 x 52 cm, 2017





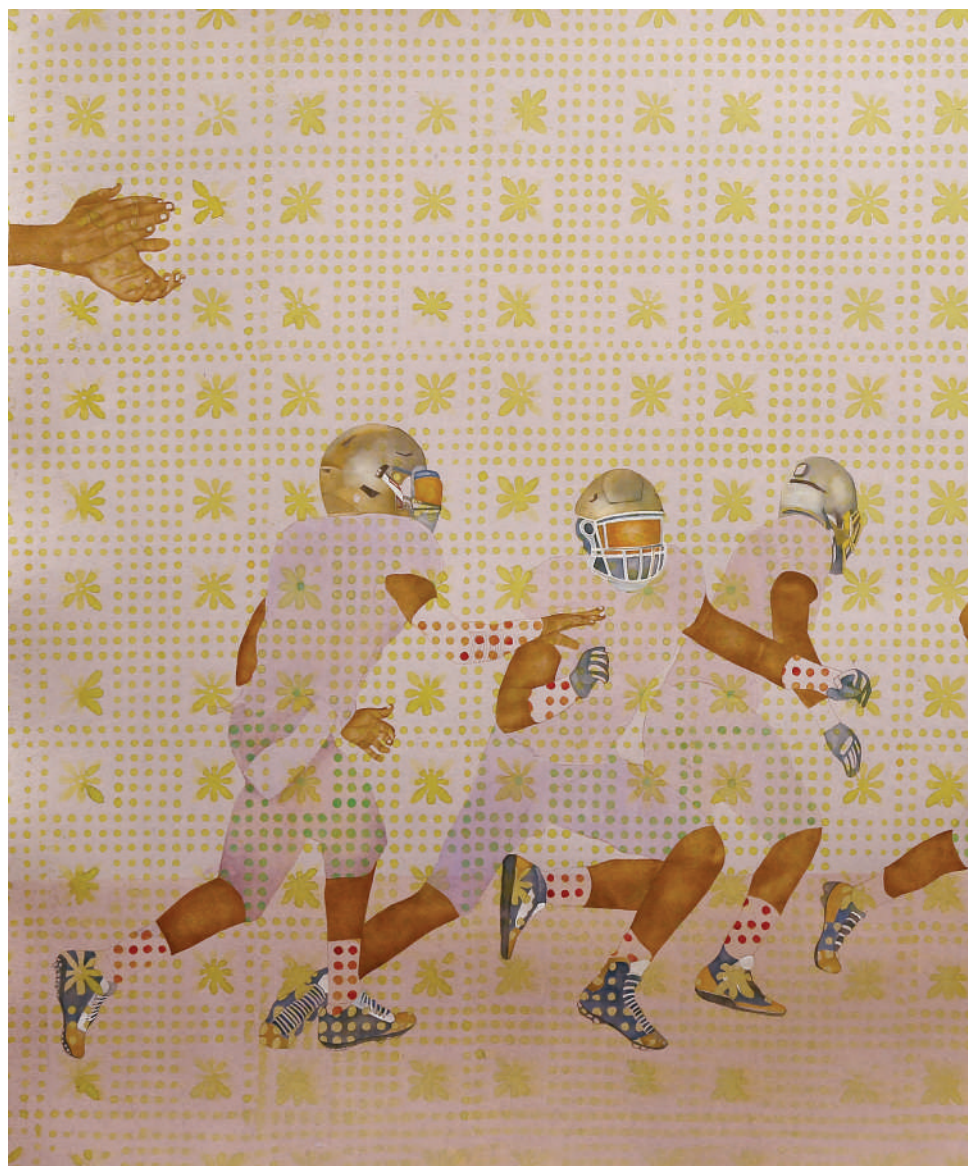
Catfight, gouache on wasli, 74 x 109 cm, 2017

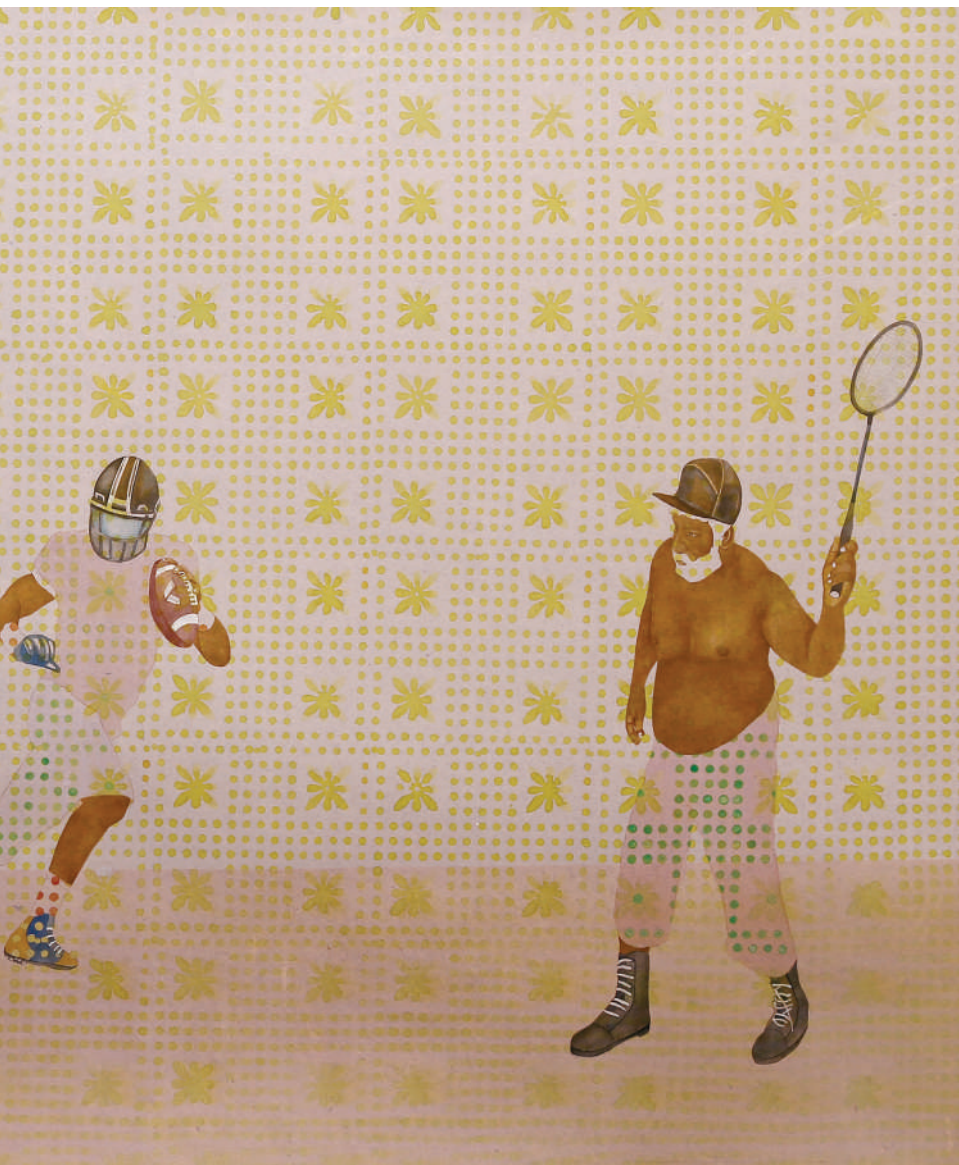




Meet Mr. Miss-Fit, gouache on wasli, 67 x 48 cm, 2017



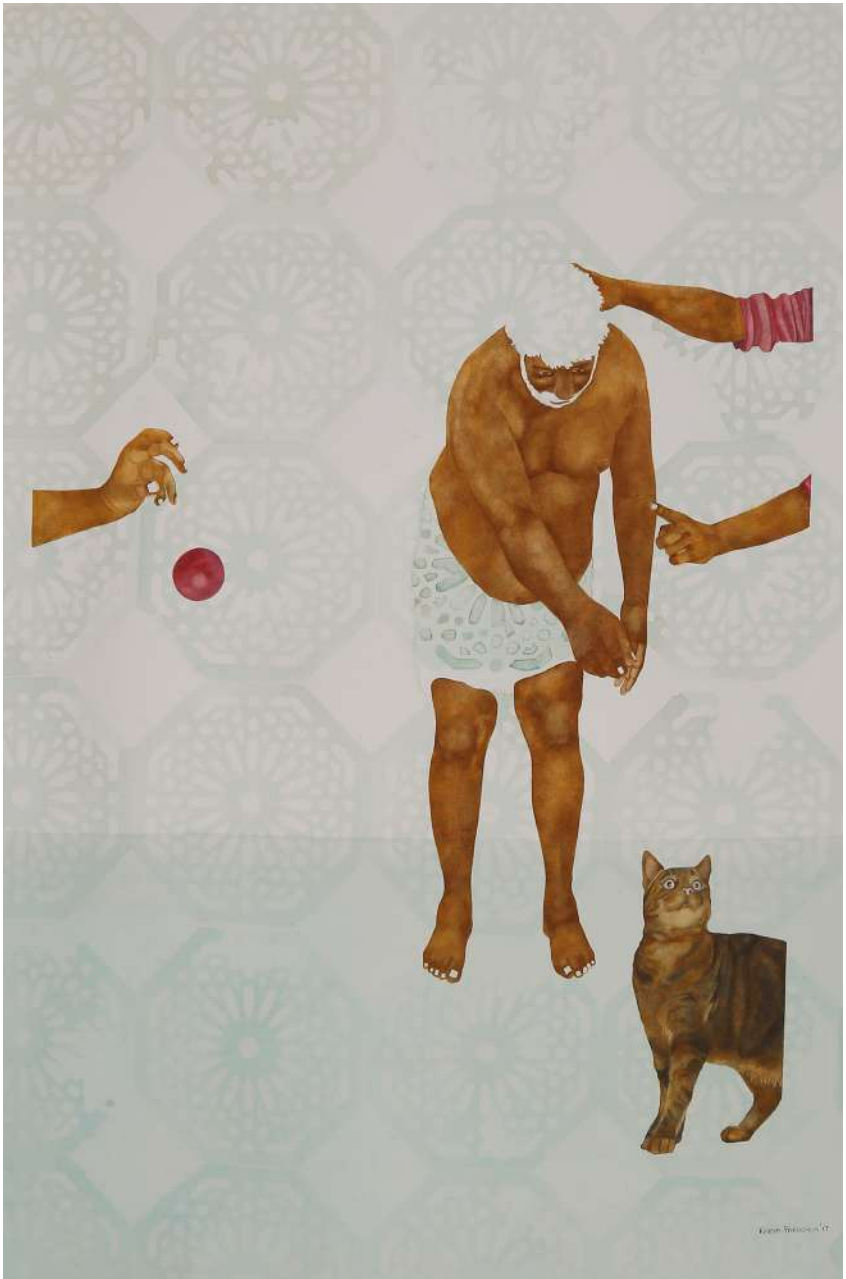




Clap Clap, I Approve!, gouache on wasli, 84 x 145 cm, 2017



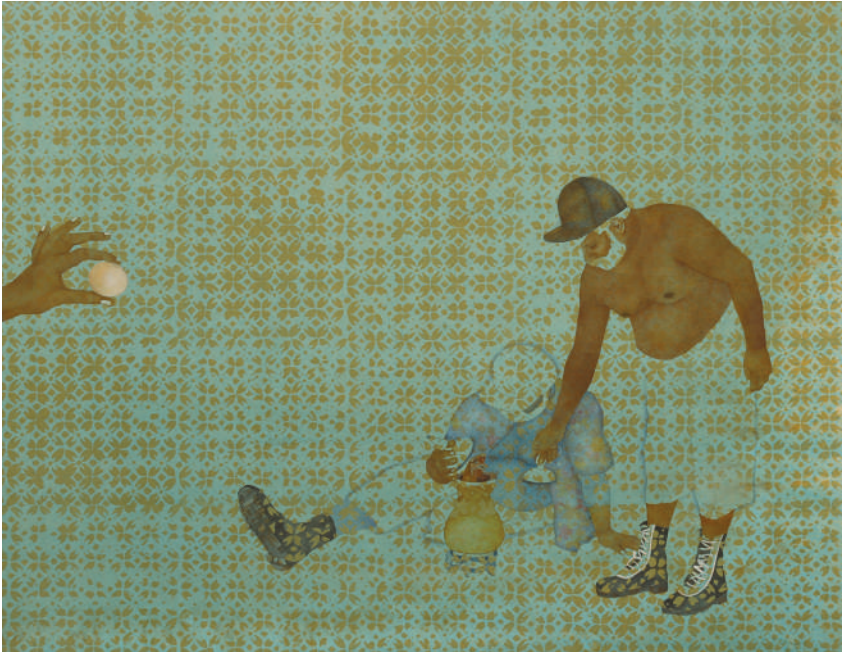




Shh, it's a pussy cat!, gouache on wasli, 109 x 81 cm, 2017



Rhythm is a dancer, gouache on wasli, 146 x 98 cm, 2017



Which came first?, gouache on wasli, 51 x 66 cm, 2017

Probably the most important aspect of Farooqui's new work is the inclusion of repeated patterns in her imagery. Surfaces filled with various symmetrical motifs serve as backdrop where the main action unfolds. However, the presence of these pattern is not prominent, as the entire compositions are constructed with layers of images which, either transparent or opaque, formulate a language in which each syllable is heard and participates in the larger scheme of meaning. In her paintings, these designs, in some cases, appear connected to the acts of human bodies. For example, the zigzag pattern is placed in the background of two humans fighting with each other. Or arabesque introduced in the visual with a man playing on his guitar adds the lyrical quality of the image. At other places these are mere backdrops, which we usually see in buildings, on attires and in innumerable man-made objects. We spend our life among these patterns – often not realizing their effect, impact and power.

Nature does not offer a range of pattern, it is the man who makes pattern, which signifies order. Man, in a way seeks to establish order/logic within the diversity, spread and spontaneity of elements in his surroundings. This surge for pattern has an effect on our behaviour, because we also learn to live in the domain of codes, order, and pattern. In our behaviour, habits, and thoughts, we usually – and not knowingly – follow repeated pattern; same what we come across when we step on a tiled floor, walk next to a brick building, select a piece of fabric for our home, pick a tie, get a sari, buy a lawn suit, weave a







A tournament of Mujras, gouache on wasli, 95 x 147 cm, 2017





Peek-a-boo, I see you!, gouache on wasli, 46 x 69 cm, 2017







Lets laugh through the crack, gouache on wasli, 88 x 102 cm, 2017

carpet, or design a publication. Patterns have taught us not to step beyond limits, and to accept the predictable.

In that way, the layer of patterns for Farooqui is a means of conveying the normality of pain. This, the political understanding of her work is supported by her preference of imagery and her choice of building these uncanny happenings. “Thereby, my work takes on a satirical approach to represent an exaggeration of conflict, distraction, opposing views which are inevitably highlighted through the use of these objects and thus narratives”. So, no matter if a man is shirtless, engages in odd situations with others, survives strange circumstances, each condition due to the repetition becomes routine, acceptable and even enjoyable narrative. Like the perpetual footage of violence on our electronic media, which transforms the gory scenes of death, destruction and carnage into ‘tamed’ pictures – seen and ignored easily.

But it is the job of an artist to realize this condition, and comment on it, no matter how remote and indirectly; as in the art of Rabia Farooqui.



Born in 1992, Rabia Farooqui is a visual artist currently based in Karachi. She received her BFA from Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi in 2015. Farooqui majored in Miniature Painting and has taken part in numerous exhibitions including a group show 'Neon' at Sanat Gallery and an auction show 'Awaken Our Legacy' hosted by Standard Chartered Bank, Karachi.

In March 2017, Farooqui was selected to represent Pakistan in 'Green Olive Art', an artist residency in Morocco for Convergence 2017 where she took part in an open studio event along with seven other artists belonging to countries from all over the world.

Farooqui is also the Creative Director at Nadia Farooqui, a luxury clothing brand based in Karachi. At present, she is involved with various artistic projects as well as working on her next body of work.

Farooqui's work aims to bring about the use of gestures and objects in everyday situations to represent conflicting thoughts and viewpoints.

Object recognition plays a significant role in translating her composition. Visual representation of an object instantly guides one to generic knowledge of that particular object, however, Farooqui wants to highlight what we fail to understand; only by assigning a label can one ground the object in one's own experience. Each object, though it has one definition, will evoke a different response from different people.

Similarly as humans, our body language paired with the use of gestures tends to give away more information than is required. These gestures have the potential to provide a link between action and thought because gesture not only represents information but also gives the onlooker an insight into what is truly felt on a personal level.

Farooqui strives to create scenarios where the obvious presence of a conflict exists; a mere contradiction of two opposing thoughts which are influenced by preconceived standards and views set by society. A person could think one thing, however act another. One could choose to behave in a certain way but not act on it due to what others might think.

Every time a statement is made, it usually has two meanings - one that is in one's mind and the other that is portrayed. Thereby, Farooqui's work takes on a satirical approach to represent an exaggeration of conflict, distraction, opposing views which are inevitably highlighted through the use of these objects and thus narratives.



This publication accompanies the exhibition

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Detail of "A tournament of Mujras"

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